

# Bridal

# GUIDE

**TIMES NEWS**  
— MEDIA GROUP —

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**LEHIGH VALLEY PRESS LVP**

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# Questions to ask when vetting wedding vendors

The process of planning a wedding involves the coordination of many different components, including people. It can be stressful and it can be exciting. Chances are the couple-to-be will be handling conversations with vendors they may have never worked with before.

It may be tempting to simply sign on the dotted line when hiring wedding vendors and hope for the best. But the process can prove more fruitful when couples prepare for it by compiling a list of questions designed to ensure they know what they're getting before they enter into a contract.

### Is the date available?

The most important question to ask is whether the vendor is available on the day you have chosen to get married. The house of worship or place where you will be exchanging vows should be set first, and then additional vendors can be interviewed to confirm their availability and the scope of their services.

### How long have you been in business?

How long a company has been in business, and more importantly how much experience they have with weddings, can be a telling detail. Experience is not always indica-

tive of ability, but vendors with long track records of success may prove easy to work with.

### Are you insured?

Check if the vendor is insured. It can be a risky proposition to work with vendors who are not insured.

### Will you be on site to oversee things?

From florists to private caterers to specialty performers, it is acceptable to ask vendors if they will be there the day of the wedding to manage things or if it will be a third party or another representative. Confirm all pertinent details, including who will be there on the day of the wedding, in advance.

### What is your payment schedule and cancellation policy?

Understand how the vendor expects to be paid. Many businesses require a deposit up front to book the date. Some may want payment in full a week or so before the wedding day. Others may enable you to make monthly payments for a set period of time. Ask how the vendor handles cancellations, and whether any deposit or portion of the money already paid will be refunded.

### When is the last possible date for making changes?

See **QUESTIONS** on Page 5

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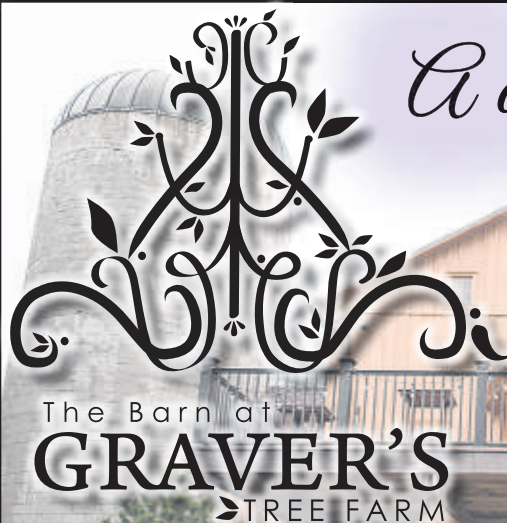
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# What to know when picking a wedding reception menu

Lots of details require a decision when planning a wedding. Engaged couples may or may not enjoy tending to much of the minutiae involved in wedding planning, but the reception menu is typically one popular point of interest.

When picking a wedding reception menu, couples typically get to sit down with their venue operator or caterer and take a taste test so they can decide what to include and exclude come the big night. That typically results in some happy hearts and full bellies. But there's more to picking a reception menu than taste, and the following are some pointers couples can consider as they aim to provide a tasty meal for their wedding guests.

Resist the urge to make the menu reflect your personal preference. Couples, particularly those footing the bill for their own weddings, may be tempted to pick exclusively foods they like for the reception. Though it's important that couples get to enjoy their first meal together after tying the knot, it's good to ensure that guests get to have an enjoyable meal as well. Resist any urge to let personal preferences dictate the menu, particularly if you have a restrictive diet. For example, vegans need not insist everyone eat a vegan meal at the reception nor should meat lovers insist that every plate end up with some red meat on it. Diversify the menu so people with various preferences can fill up and enjoy their dinner.

Inquire about food allergies. When inviting guests, ask them to cite



any food allergies they may have when they RSVP. Many banquet halls and caterers are now accustomed to accommodating diners with food allergies, but the earlier that information is communicated, the more time couples have to pick delicious foods that won't compromise the health of guests who must avoid certain dishes or ingredients.

Align food with degree of formality. It's important that couples consider the ambiance of the wedding when picking a reception menu. A pig roast might be ideal for a backyard wedding, but something more formal is called for when dining in a lavishly decorated banquet hall. Couples can keep this in mind when choosing the menu. It's also notable that caterers tend to have a creative side, so they might be able to present certain foods in ways that match the vibe of the wedding even if those dishes would not ordinarily align with the ambiance of the reception.

Leave the experimentation to the cocktail hour. If couples have certain exotic foods in mind, they can still serve those items but do so during the cocktail hour. Guests

can simply turn down the chance to try exotic foods during the cocktail hour without going hungry. But a sit-down dinner should ensure every guest has something to fill their belly.

Picking a reception menu is a fun and filling component of wedding planning. Keeping some simple pointers in mind can help couples pick a menu everyone can enjoy.

## QUESTIONS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Know how long you have to make any changes to your plans, colors, music choices, or other details.

**Are there any additional fees?**

It's important to determine if gratuity, travel, overtime charges, cleaning fees, or any other charges are included in the contract or if it leaves room for additional expenses.

**Is mine your only wedding that day? How do you handle conflicts?**

Figure out if the vendor handles just one wedding per day or if they have staff to cover multiple weddings on a given date.

**Do prices differ depending on time of day, month or year?**

Certain dates are busier than others. Find out if the vendor charges a premium for holidays or particular times of the year.

Couples are urged to exercise due diligence and ensure contracts with vendors specify all details before signing on the dotted line.

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# Time management tips for your wedding day

As any married couple can attest, a wedding day has a tendency to fly by. Couples have much to do on the day they tie the knot, which can make the day feel like a whirlwind.

Certain skills can come in especially handy on a wedding day, and the ability to manage time is certainly one of them. As their big day draws closer, couples can employ these time management tips to slow the day down a little bit.

- Create and distribute a schedule. A schedule can ensure the happy couple and all members of the bridal party know when and where they need to be at certain times during the day. Include all pertinent information on the schedule, including when and where hair and makeup appointments begin, when transportation to and from the ceremony and reception site will arrive and, of course, the start time for the ceremony. A printed copy can help, but a digital copy sent via text or email can guarantee the schedule is accessible via smartphone at all times during

the day.

- Collaborate with your photographer in advance of your wedding day. Couples can streamline wedding day photography sessions by collaborating with their photographer in advance. During these sessions, identify the bridal party shots you want to take and then create a schedule of photos so all party members know where they need to be and when. Some couples choose to schedule bridal party photoshoots before the ceremony, while others prefer theirs after the couple has made it official. Regardless of which option couples prefer, schedule these photos so no time is wasted finding bridal party members.

- Don't forget to set aside time to eat. Anything can derail a wedding day schedule if it's forgotten when couples devise their initial plan for how the day will unfold. Couples might be less inclined to forget hair and makeup appointments and photo sessions because such components are integral to wedding planning. But



couples should not forget to leave time for themselves and their bridal party to eat. Schedule a breakfast for all bridal party members (separate ones if couples insist on avoiding each other until the ceremony) to ensure no one sleeps in and throws off the day's timeline. Include time to eat lunch if the ceremony is in late afternoon or early evening. If you forget to schedule time to eat, the timeline will almost certainly be thrown off when everyone gets hun-

gry and requires some sustenance.

- Go over schedules with your vendors. In the weeks prior to your wedding, reach out to your vendors to confirm the day's timeline. Do this prior to handing out a schedule to your bridal party so no one is confused if any last-minute changes are made.

Couples have much to manage on their wedding days. Perhaps no component is more important to manage effectively than time.

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# Options abound when shopping for wedding reception venues

A wedding ceremony is a joyous occasion couples will remember forever. As couples walk down the aisle after making their union official, the focus then shifts to the reception, where a fun-filled night of food, laughter and dancing awaits.

Nothing can trump the ceremony in terms of meaningful moments, but wedding receptions tend to last far longer. That's why couples devote so much effort to finding the right reception venue. As couples get to work on planning their post-ceremony party, they can consider a wide range of reception venue options.

## Banquet hall

Banquet halls are perhaps the most traditional option for hosting wedding receptions. They're also among the most popular, as the The Knot 2022 Real Weddings Study found that one in five couples had their wedding receptions at banquet halls. There's no end to the options available to couples who want to host their receptions at banquet halls, which run the gamut from more intimate venues to larger sites that can host hundreds of guests. Some banquet halls offer various rooms and even different styles of rooms, from traditional to modern, all



at one site. Because banquet halls are designed to host special occasions like weddings, couples may find they are an especially planner-friendly option.

## Beach venue

Beach reception venues are not limited to coastal communities. Though oceanfront venues are an option for couples who live on a coast or those opting for destination weddings, even landlocked locales have beach venues along rivers and lakes. When considering a beach venue, couples should inquire about contingency locations should Mother Nature not cooperate come the big day.

## Boat/yacht

Keeping with a water theme, couples may want

to look into celebrating on a boat or yacht. This option can make for an especially memorable and unique experience, but it's important to keep guests in mind before booking a boat or yacht for your reception. Some guests, such as aging relatives or loved ones with young children (at home or at the reception), may want to attend the reception but not stay for its duration, which is not an option on a boat or yacht. Others may be hesitant due to seasickness or another preexisting medical condition. If no such issues are likely to present, couples may find it hard to beat the ambiance of a reception aboard a boat or yacht.

## Campgrounds

The Knot reports a surge in the popularity of campground receptions in recent years. A campground reception can be ideal for couples who love the great outdoors and prefer a less formal and more fun-focused reception. This option may require a little extra coordinating on couples' part, as they will likely need to supply all of the food and beverages and may even need to arrange for guests to safely access the venue.

There's no shortage of locations for couples to host their wedding receptions. Each venue is unique, and couples can undoubtedly find a facility that has what they're looking for.

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# Simple tips to plan a fun and relaxing cocktail hour

With so much on their docket in relation to wedding planning, engaged couples can be forgiven if certain components garner less attention than others. The ceremony and reception are bound to stay on couples' radar, but what about the time in between saying "I do" and cutting a rug on the reception room dance floor?

Cocktail hours are a great way to keep guests entertained between the ceremony and the reception. Many couples use this period to take their bridal party wedding photos, so offering guests a little food and some drinks during a cocktail hour can benefit everyone. Planning a cocktail hour is not a significant undertaking, but couples can keep a few pointers in

mind as they plan this interim period between the ceremony and reception.

- Opt for an outdoor cocktail hour when possible. Couples tying the knot in spring, summer or fall at a venue with ample outdoor entertaining space can choose to host the cocktail hour outside. This reduces the likelihood that guests will feel cramped and it also sets a positive tone for the remainder of the evening. A balcony, patio or rooftop entertaining area can be great spaces for guests to mingle prior to the reception.

- Offer seating. Cocktail hours tend to be stand-up affairs where guests mingle with long-lost friends or relatives while enjoying some light hors d'oeuvres. However, older guests or guests with

small children will appreciate some seating. Couples need not ensure there's a seat for each guest, but some strategically located high-tops and more traditional tables for guests with mobility issues can ensure anyone who needs to sit down can do so.

- Give guests something to do. If the cocktail hour will be a full hour or more, couples can consider ways to help guests pass the time. Some may be content to relax and chat with friends and family over a drink, but others may grow a little bored as the hour drags on. A photobooth or selfie station so couples can have a ready-made wedding album before the reception begins can be fun for guests. For less formal affairs, consider provid-

ing some popular outdoor games, like cornhole and bocce.

- Set a tone with music. Music can help set the tone for a cocktail hour, which is not meant to get the ball rolling on the dancing-heavy revelry to come during the reception. Some simple instrumental music, whether it's provided by a live string quartet or pre-recorded, can establish the cocktail hour as a peaceful period to relax, chat, eat a little, and enjoy a drink before the reception begins. Reserve the dance music for when the reception hits full swing.

It's easy to overlook the cocktail hour when planning a wedding. However, some simple tips can ensure guests enjoy the time between the ceremony and reception.

  
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# The responsibilities of bridal party members

A couple's wedding day is one they will never forget. Guests' focus is squarely on the happy couple on the day they're set to make their union official. However, happy couples are not the only ones with important roles to play during a wedding. Being asked to be in a bridal party is a unique honor. With that honor comes responsibility, as each person in a bridal party can do their own part to ensure a couple's wedding day is a success.

## Maid or matron of honor

A maid of honor and matron of honor perform the same functions. The terms are simply unique because a maid of honor refers to a person who has not yet gotten married, while the term matron of honor is used for a person who has gotten married. Brides also



may choose a man to serve as man of honor. Whatever title is appropriate, the person who serves in this capacity will help the bride plan the wedding, including being there to offer insight when shopping for a wedding dress. This person also may coordinate the bachelorette party and periodically speak with bridesmaids to ensure everyone is on schedule. The maid of honor will typically give a bridal toast during the reception.

## Best man

Don't let the title fool you, as many couples now choose to have a best woman. Like the maid of honor, the best man may be asked to help with wedding planning and is typically tasked with organizing the bachelor party and toasting the groom during the reception. The best man also can help to ensure groomsmen are on schedule with tuxedo fittings.

## Bridesmaids/Groomsmen

Bridesmaids stand beside the bride during the wedding ceremony. They can help with planning and help to resolve any last-minute issues that may arise on the big day, such as a vendor arriving late.

Groomsmen stand next to the groom during the ceremony and may be asked to help the best man plan the bachelor party. Both bridesmaids and groomsmen also may be asked to help host events leading up to the big day, such as a shower or engagement party.

## Ring bearer/flower girl

The roles of ring bearer and flower girl are typically filled by young relatives of the couple, such as nieces, nephews or young cousins. The flower girl walks down the aisle in advance

See **MEMBERS** on Page 15

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# Wedding day transportation options

Weddings involve many moving pieces that must all come together successfully for one glorious day. Transportation is among the details that need to be sorted in advance, particularly when wedding parties and guests must move between ceremony and reception sites.

It is customary for the wedding party, which tends to include a couple's parents, to be provided a ride to both the ceremony and reception. Furthermore, couples may have to figure out what to do when the wedding is over, particularly if the reception and ceremonies are a good distance apart. Here

are a few transportation options couples can consider.

### Limousines

Limousines are classic modes of transportation to and from momentous events. They typically feature seating to accommodate six or more people. Limousines typically bring the wedding party to the ceremony, then wait for the duration and transport everyone to the reception. Then the cars will leave from there unless other arrangements are made.

### Party bus

Many couples opt for a party bus to transport themselves and/or their wedding parties. Party

buses are larger than limousines, and as their name implies, often establish a festive atmosphere. Couples may ask their wedding party members to meet at the ceremony location, and then a party bus will take everyone to the reception location after vows are exchanged. Party buses often play music and have refreshments available. They can be entertaining on long rides.

### Shuttle bus

Couples can consider providing a shuttle to and from the airport or between other points to facilitate ease for the wedding party and guests. A shuttle can take individ-

uals from the reception site to a nearby hotel if overnight stays have been booked. A shuttle can bring certain individuals back to the ceremony site, a transportation hub or another centralized location where they can get to their own private vehicles and back home. The couple also will need transportation home or to embark on the honeymoon, so it's helpful to have reliable taxi service numbers or rideshare options at the ready.

Transportation is not a glamorous part of wedding planning, but it is a necessity that should be ironed out well in advance.

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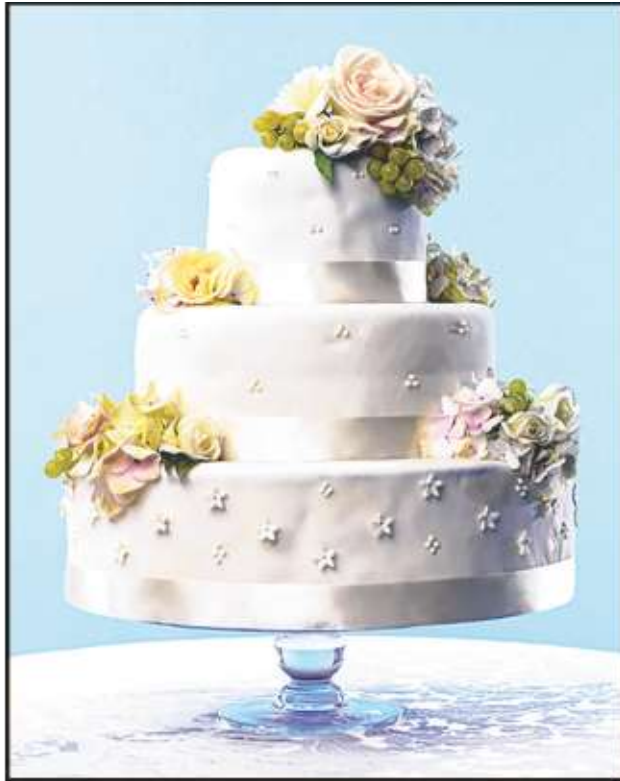
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# Dig into these wedding cake options

Something sweet comes near the end of a wedding reception and that is the joy the couple experiences knowing they have their entire lives ahead of them to enjoy together. However, there is another sweet treat that is shared near the conclusion of the wedding and it is typically served with tea and coffee: the wedding cake.

Wedding cake traditions can be traced back to the ancient Greeks and Romans. Cakes represented good luck and fertility for the couples tying the knot. The first wedding cakes were rather bland and breadlike, representing purity and virginity. Some were quite like the fruitcake now enjoyed during the holiday season. Eventually wedding cakes transformed into the sweet confections that are known today. The modern wedding cake as most know it



debuted at the 1882 wedding of Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany. His wedding cake was actu-

ally the first to be completely edible. Previously, some cakes featured wooden broomstick pillars covered in icing, but the Duke's cake used a hardened type of icing, according to Edible Art Bakery and Desert Café. Couples today have many options when picking their wedding cakes. The following are some wedding cake tidbits to chew on.

Wedding cakes can be quite costly. Wedding Wire estimates the average wedding cake costs around \$500. One way for couples to save on their cake is to have a faux cake on display, with one tier that is made from cake and can be cut. Guests will then be served slices of a sheet cake that is much less expensive.

Couples have many flavors to choose from. Vanilla is classic and quite popular because it appeals to a vast number

of people. Lemon, chocolate, and carrot are some other popular cake flavors. Couples can choose among various cake styles. Many opt for a classic style, which is typically a white or ivory tiered cake with simple, elegant decorations. Rustic cakes may be much less ornate, while modern cakes may be rectangular or square and feature clean lines and minimalist decoration. The cake should fit the overall theme and scope of the wedding as it is another complementary component of the larger celebration.

When it comes to frosting a cake, there are various outer coatings that will encapsulate the cake to make it both beautiful and durable. Buttercream, Swiss meringue, fondant, cream cheese, and ganache all can be used in various applications. Some bakers attest that Swiss meringue, due to the addition of egg whites, makes it a more stable option over traditional buttercreams, particularly during warm weather. Of course, couples can opt for a "naked cake," which usually has a scant amount of frosting so that the cake underneath peeks through.

A groom's cake used to be tradition, but largely fell out of favor, although it is still alive and well in the American South. The groom's cake typically is less ornate than the wedding cake, and favors the groom's choices in style, interests and flavors.

Couples and their guests look forward to indulging in wedding cake near the end of the reception. The looks and flavors of a wedding cake can be as unique as the couple saying, "I do."



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# 7 reasons to hire a wedding planner

The average cost of a wedding in 2022 in the United States came out to roughly \$30,000, according to a survey of 12,000 couples compiled by wedding planning site The Knot. The survey also found New Jersey and Massachusetts topped the list of most costly states to tie the knot.

When committing to as significant a financial investment as a wedding, couples may want to do all they can to ensure their big day is a hit. There are many advantages to hiring a professional wedding planner, who can take the stress out of a process that should be fun.

1. Serves as a sounding board: Wedding planners can take couples' ideas and turn them into reality. Seasoned planners know how to help a couple's vision come alive.

2. Lightens the responsibility load: A wedding planner takes time-consuming responsibilities off couples' plates. These can include scheduling appointments, dealing with vendors, conducting walk-throughs of locations, and more. This can be a big asset to couples who work full-time.

3. Offers a wealth of knowledge: A good wedding planner has years of experience handling weddings and will know which aspects will work and which may not. Also, a wedding planner can likely handle tasks expeditiously, while couples with no experience planning a wedding may not work so quickly.

4. Helps couples save money: Knowledge and experience also comes with contacts in the industry that can help couples save money. The planner likely knows



where to get the best deals, and may be privy to insider pricing and other discounts.

5. Serves as a buffer: While everyone wants weddings to be incident-free, conflicts can and do arise. A wedding planner can serve as a mediator or run interference between challenging family members or even vendors.

6. Reduces overall stress levels: There's a measurable difference between the stress experienced by couples who don't hire wedding planners and those who do. The main goal of a wedding is for it to be memorable and for couples and their guests to enjoy themselves. By leaving the planning to someone else, couples can arrive at the big day feeling more relaxed and ready to have fun.

7. There is an extra person around: Wedding planners can field questions or handle tipping

and other tasks on the wedding day, freeing up time for couples to have fun.

Wedding planners

can provide support, expertise, company, and industry contacts to make weddings go smoothly.

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# The benefits to hosting a wedding ceremony and reception at the same venue

Streamlining the wedding planning process can help couples feel relaxed and enable them to more fully enjoy their big day. Hosting a wedding ceremony and reception at the same location is one way to streamline and simplify the planning process.

According to the wedding resource *Here Comes the Guide*, all-in-one venues are preferred by the majority of modern engaged couples. Couples contemplating such an approach can consider the following benefits to tying the knot and hosting the reception at the same venue.

- **Streamlined planning:** Rather than having to coordinate with two places, all of couples' attention can be directed to one location and working with one party coordinator. This can reduce the propensity for mix-ups.

- **Ease of transport:** Figuring out how to move between multiple locations and schedule hired vehicles and the like can be a chore. With one venue, guests simply arrive and are done with travel until the festivities end.

- **Seamless transition:** Sometimes there can be an awkward period between the ceremony and the reception. In such sit-



uations, a ceremony may end but the cocktail hour is still an hour or two away. A ceremony and reception in one locale can eliminate the gap, as such venues typically begin the cocktail hour a short time after the ceremony has ended.

- **Better guest attendance:** Guests who may find it challenging to

get to two different locations, particularly those who don't drive or must rely on public transportation or a taxi, may find a single-location wedding more convenient.

- **Outdoor ceremony:** Couples who want to exchange vows outdoors often can do so when they have one wedding location because the nuptials are taking place outside of a house of worship, which may not allow for an outdoor wedding due to the sanctity of the location.

- **Fewer travel worries:** With a single location, it makes it much easier if inclement weather dampens the occasion because there is far less traveling involved.

Couples can keep in mind that a single-loc-

ation wedding may come with some challenges. Unless the location is on the grounds of a house of worship, the wedding may lack the religious or spiritual component that some couples aspire to. Also, weather can cause issues if couples had hoped to have the ceremony outdoors and must move it into the same space as the reception as a plan B, necessitating a turnover of the room. Couples also may be limited in their photo backdrops, as there will not be two separate places where photos are taken, particularly if the wedding space is limited.

Hosting a ceremony and reception at a single location can benefit couples who want to simplify and streamline their wedding planning.

An advertisement for Mountaintop Concert Venue &amp; Restaurant. The top part has the text "MOUNTAINTOP CONCERT VENUE &amp; RESTAURANT" in a stylized font. Below that is a photograph of the venue at night, showing a large building and a parking lot with many cars. In the bottom left corner, there is a logo for "Penn's Peak" with a mountain range. In the bottom right corner, there is contact information: "325 MAURY ROAD JIM THORPE, PA PENNSPEAK.COM 866-605-PEAK". At the very bottom, it says "LIVE MUSIC. GREAT TIMES."

# Popular wedding photography packages

Capturing the memorable moments of a wedding is a necessity. Hiring a talented photographer is an important component of wedding preparations. The best way to preserve a wedding day for years to come is through photographs and videography.

The Knot 2022 Real Weddings Study indicates 88 percent of survey respondents hired photographers for their weddings, and the average cost for a professional photographer is around \$2,600.

When couples begin to vet local photographers, they quickly will learn that many photographers bundle their services into packages. Each package will contain some standard offerings, which typically expand as the price goes up. Although each photographer will do things a little differently, here is a generalized idea of what wedding photography packages may entail.

## Base photo package

The base package likely will include the services of one photographer and potentially a helper. The photographer will be available for a predetermined period of time to capture both the ceremony and the reception. This package will include an agreed upon number of edited proofs, of which the couple can choose a specific number that will be processed for viewing, sharing or printing. The photographer may sign over print rights, or you may need to use them exclusively for prints depending on the package and price. Proofs and processed photos typically are shared through an online link.

## Intermediate photo package

An intermediate photo package will build on the base and will include additional services. The photographer may take photos

at a set number of alternative locations. This can be advantageous if you'd like to take photos at a nearby park or seaside location. This package also may extend how long the photographer will be with you, with some arriving early to take "getting dressed" photographs.

Intermediate packages may include a full printed and bound wedding album for the couple, and print rights to even more processed photos in an online gallery for sharing. This package also may allow couples to share the gallery with others so they can view and print their own photos.

## Advanced photo package

A soup-to-nuts photography package is often the most expensive and extensive package a photographer offers. It may include an all-day commitment from the photographer and an assistant, unlim-

ited locations for photo shoots, exclusive print rights to the couple for any photos that have been captured and processed, and other perks like extensive retouching and photo editing of photographs.

More inclusive packages also may include engagement photo sessions and even after-wedding bookings for post-honeymoon or first anniversary shoots.

In addition to online galleries and a printed wedding album, an advanced package may feature albums for parents and matted and framed portraits. If the photographer contracts with a videographer, packages also may combine photo and video services and share the digital files accordingly.

Photographers often have various packages that can accommodate couples working on budgets of various sizes.

## MEMBERS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

of the bride, spreading pedals as she goes. The ring bearer carries the wedding rings down the aisle.

## Parents

If they choose to do so, parents of the happy couple can help to pay for the wedding. The custom of the bride's parents paying the entire bill has largely fallen by the wayside, as many

modern couples now pay for their own weddings. Parents can offer to pay for the engagement party and/or rehearsal dinner, but such generosity is not expected of them.

Serving in a wedding

party is a unique and humbling honor. The roles of each person in the party vary, and party members who want to do their best for the couple can study up on their responsibilities in advance of the big day.

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